

under the new Family Member Appointment. This position allows them to begin accruing retirement credit. However, these individuals are not allowed to pay back into the FERS for time worked in PIT positions. As a result, many Foreign Service spouses who worked as a PIT between 1989 and 1998 have lost up to nine or ten years of retirement credit.

Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of grave consequence to many Americans who devoted their most productive years to public service abroad. Foreign Service Officers and their spouses live lives that often put them in physical danger and cause great emotional distress. One constituent recounted being taken hostage with her husband by terrorists in Peru; while she was released early, she did not know if her husband was alive, injured, or dead.

It is simply unfair that these individuals, who have lived and worked under incredibly stressful conditions and who had no choice as to the type of work they performed, are not able to buy back the retirement credit they earned. As I indicated, some of my constituents have lost up to nine years of retirement credit because this provision has not been corrected. I urge my colleagues to join me in cosponsoring this important legislation.

THE AMERICAN WETLAND RESTORATION ACT

HON. WALTER B. JONES

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mr. JONES of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to announce the introduction of the "American Wetland Restoration Act."

This legislation builds upon the wetlands mitigation banking legislation I introduced in the last 3 Congresses and also the 1995 Federal Guidance issued by the Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

My Congressional district in eastern North Carolina includes most of the coast and four major river basins. More than 60% of my district could be classified as wetlands. My constituents are directly impacted by wetlands and the countless regulations that protect them. I have been contacted by farmers, business owners, state and local officials, land owners and even the military for advice and guidance in order to reach a balance between protecting these valuable resources while improving water quality but also providing for strong economic development.

On almost a daily basis, we are reminded of the critical role wetlands play in our ecosystems, specifically in maintaining water quality.

Wetlands mitigation banking is a concept readily embraced by regulators, developers and environmentalists. This balanced approach recognizes the need to protect our wetland resources while ensuring property owners their rights to have reasonable use of their properties.

Federal legislation is not only warranted, it is vital. While mitigation banking is occurring, it is limited because the authorizing agencies

have little or no statutory guidance. Also, investors and venture capitalists are hesitant to invest the money needed to restore wetlands without legal certainty. One of the great benefits of private mitigation banking is that the monitoring of one large tract of wetland requires fewer resources than monitoring thousands of tiny, unsuccessful mitigation projects.

But, before a single credit is ever issued and before a wetlands mitigation banker can ever earn a dime, they must acquire land, develop a comprehensive restoration plan and establish a cash endowment for the long-term maintenance of the bank. This daunting challenge is magnified when you recall that there is no current statutory authority!

These mitigation banks give economic value to wetlands, potentially providing billions of dollars to restoring wetlands in sensitive watersheds. Unlike other mitigation projects, mitigation banks are complete ecosystems. So instead of only trying to protect the remaining wetlands, mitigation banking will actually increase wetlands acreage!

My legislation sets a simple but lofty goal: No net loss of wetlands. Specifically, the legislation requires

- (1) That mitigation banks meet rigorous financial standards to assure wetlands are restored and preserved over the long term;
- (2) That there is an ample opportunity for meaningful public participation;
- (3) That banks must have a credible long-term operation and maintenance plan;
- (4) That the banks be inspected by the same regulatory agencies who have assigned the credits and permitted the banks; and,
- (5) That the banks only receive credits if they prove the continuing ecological success of their project, thus allowing regulators to ensure a 100% success rate of the projects they monitor.

Mitigation banking places the responsibility for restoration and preservation of wetlands in the hands of the experts and establishes the financial incentive to make the restoration work. By applying sound environmental engineering to the restoration process, setting up a longterm monitoring and maintenance endowment, and having the regulatory controls in place—these are the assurances my legislation requires of any potential banking project.

This free-market approach to environmental conservation and stewardship is hard for some to swallow. But I ask you, many organizations have profited greatly from stringent environmental regulations, yet where has all the money gone that was allegedly spent on protecting the environment? And are our lands and waterways really in better hands when the Federal government is the owner or administrator?

I do not believe the interests of the economy and the environment have to be at odds. Wetlands mitigation banking makes conservation good business. It provides the financial and ecological incentives to make restoring, preserving and protecting our environment successful.

The end result, protecting and preserving environmentally sensitive lands, is assured with my legislation. The "American Wetland Restoration Act" will give wetlands mitigation banking the statutory authority it needs to flourish, and it will begin restoring the wetlands that many thought were lost forever.

I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting this bill.

REFORM DAIRY PRICING REGULATIONS

HON. THOMAS E. PETRI

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 4, 2001

Mr. PETRI. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing a bill that will reform the method by which fluid milk has been priced in our country for too long. The Federal Milk Marketing Order system is a relic that fixes prices and feebly serves the outdated aims of a bygone era. Created in the 1930's, its original purpose was ostensibly to provide a locally produced supply of fresh milk throughout the country. Over sixty years ago, such a system may have made more economic sense. We didn't have the Interstate highway system, efficient refrigerated trucks, or reconstituted milk, for example. Today, conditions are vastly different, necessitating reform of the federal dairy program.

By basing the price of Class I, fluid milk, on the distance from Eau Claire, Wisconsin, the federal government has radically distorted dairy markets and discriminated against the dairy farmers of the Upper Midwest. The resulting inefficient production of milk in areas distant from the Upper Midwest has led to the oversupply of milk and depresses the price of processed dairy products. Dairy farmers in Wisconsin have paid dearly under this system. Today, my state loses approximately five dairy farmers a day.

Furthermore, by using distance to set the price of fluid milk, the federal order system is inherently anti-consumer. Consumers are stuck paying the set price for milk instead of the price determined by a free marketplace where efficiency is rewarded. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that eliminating this market distorting system would save \$669 million over five years. In an age of "global free trade," this system that effectively puts a tariff on milk from other regions of the country is absurd.

The bill I introduce today reforms the single most discriminatory element of the Federal Milk Marketing Order program by prohibiting the Secretary of Agriculture from basing the price of fluid milk on distance or transportation costs from any location outside the marketing order area unless 50 percent or more of that area's milk comes from a location outside that order area. By eliminating this factor the Secretary of Agriculture will have to consider supply and demand factors when setting milk prices as required by the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act. Additionally, the bill requires the Secretary of Agriculture to report to Congress on the specific criteria used to set milk prices. This report will include a certification that the criteria used by the Department in no way attempts to circumvent the prohibition on the use of distance or transportation costs as the basis for milk prices.

Reform of the Federal Milk Marketing Order program is long overdue. The discrimination against the dairy farmers of the Upper Midwest must end. Not only will this bill restore